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SUBJECT: ARAB LEAGUE'S KHARTOUM SUMMIT

REF: A. KHARTOUM 791 (NOTAL)
1B. CAIRO 1911

Classified by ECPO Counselor John Desrocher for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

11. (SBU) Summary. Sudan played host March 28-29 to the 18th regular summit of Arab League (AL) leaders, a meeting notable for poor attendance by heads of state and deep divisions over Iraq, Lebanon, and Hamas. AL leaders approved dozens of resolutions, covering the range of priorities for all 22 AL member states. Sudan, after assuming the AL's rotating presidency for the coming year, gained support for its call to extend the African Union's Darfur mission past October 1, to require GOS approval for any UN troop role in Darfur, and in seeking Arab funding and troop provision for AMIS when its mission mandate expires in September. On Palestine, leaders reiterated the AL's Beirut peace initiative, and sought ways to bolster Abu Mazen's leadership and entice Hamas toward the peace process.

12. (SBU) Summary, continued. On Iraq, the AL approved an envoy and a budget for a new Baghdad office expected to open in April. Leaders welcomed Jordan's proposal to host a planning session for an AL-organized reconciliation conference inside Iraq later this year, as well as an expected gathering of Iraqi religious figures. Tensions were high between Lebanese President Lahoud and Prime Minister Siniora, each seeking support for their respective camps. The AL's final statement adhered closely to Syrian positions, particularly on the topic of Shebaa Farms. A resolution approved by the leaders identified for the first time "Kafr Shobra" as land included in Lebanon's Shebaa Farms claim. AL SYG Moussa called for Arab states to "enter the world of peaceful uses of nuclear energy with all speed and momentum." On Arab League and regional reform, leaders launched a new Arab Peace and Security Council to help resolve inter-Arab conflicts, although they shelved a proposed Arab Court of Justice. End summary.

18th Arab League Regular Summit Held in Khartoum

13. (C) Sudan played host March 28-29 to the 18th regular summit of the Arab League, and assumed the rotating presidency for the coming year. Having stepped in last year in Algiers when Djibouti passed up its turn to host the 2006 summit, Sudan's Omar Bashir welcomed the opportunity to press for Arab support for his efforts to block UN troops from entering Darfur. While the gathering passed without major incident among the 13 leaders in attendance, many commentators criticized the low turnout by heads of state (Note: Only 12 leaders appeared at both the Algiers summit

(2205) and the Tunis summit (2004). End note.) With key Arab leaders (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and the Emirates) absent, one rumor circulating at the conference was that the U.S. had pressured Arab leaders not to attend, to punish Sudan's Bashir for his obstinance over Darfur. Still, there was no shortage of foreign attendees, including senior Europeans (EU Commissioner for External Affairs Benita Ferrero-Waldner, EU Special Representative Marc Otte, the EC's Christian Leffler, Russian Deputy FM Soltanov), Turkish PM Erdogan, UN U/S Gambari and UN SYG Annan's Iraq Envoy Ashraf Qazi, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Cuban envoys, and other senior dignitaries. Similarly, a large press contingent was on-site for the entire two-day event.

Sudan Seeks Arab Support to Address Darfur Conflict

¶4. (C) Arab leaders approved a resolution on Sudan that pledged to extend African Union forces (AMIS) in Darfur with Arab troops/funding after the current AU mandate expires on September 30 (ref A). The resolution, drafted by the GOS, affirms the necessity of GOS approval for any foreign troop deployment to Darfur, and emphasizes the importance of reaching a peace agreement in Abuja between Darfur rebels and the GOS. Privately, AL senior staff shared the view that perceived intransigence of rebel groups in Abuja would only be overcome by additional USG pressure on them. Otherwise, they argued, the rebels would drag out the peace talks. Iraqi FM Zebari told us he was the only head of delegation to challenge Bashir during the closed-door session, pressing him not to "act like Saddam" in rejecting the UN's presence. AL Chief of Staff Youssef told poloff April 3 that the League understood the "UN transition is a done deal," but that details still had to be negotiated. In any case, Arab leaders want to see a peace deal in Abuja as early as possible, he said.

Palestinian Issue Source of Contention

¶5. (C) During a four-hour closed door session of Heads of Delegation plus one, much of the conversation centered on how Arab leaders would deal with a new Palestinian government led by Hamas. Iraqi FM Zebari shared with Charge and poloff that the leaders affirmed their strong support to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, and debated how best to persuade Hamas to agree to the AL's 2002 Beirut peace initiative. The leaders reportedly agreed to extend earlier funding commitments to the PA to the tune of USD 55 million per month - far less than Hamas leaders had told the media they requested from the League. In its final resolution on the topic, leaders repeated their peace initiative of 2002, and criticized unilateral actions taken by Israel with regard to the occupied territories. During a post-summit briefing in Cairo April 3, AL Chief of Staff Hisham Youssef said the leaders called upon the Quartet to take a more balanced approach to the two sides, for donors to continue funding the PA as the League would do, and criticized two French companies involved in an infrastructure project linking West Jerusalem to settlements in the West Bank.

Iraq: Arabs Concerned, AL Office to Open Soon

¶6. (C) FM Zebari told poloff immediately after the lengthy closed-door leaders' session on March 28, that Iraq had gotten "everything it wanted" with respect to the Iraq resolution. For the first time, he said, leaders accepted the Iraqi-drafted text without incident, although Zebari admitted the leaders had fresh fears for the stability of the country. He said that he had been pressed to explain news of possible talks between the U.S. and Iran over Iraq, a development many of the Arabs believed would harm Arab interests. Zebari told poloff that he had assured the delegates that any such talks would not come at the expense of the Iraqi government, nor would the Iraqi government be

excluded from such a dialogue. He chided the Arab states, he shared, for not playing a more serious role in helping Iraq regain its security and stability. Despite his upbeat assessment of the conference, Zebari caused waves when he publicly criticized the Arabs for not doing enough to help Iraq.

¶7. (SBU) Arab leaders approved a resolution authorizing the AL to open an office in Baghdad, selected a senior diplomat as its envoy, and budgeted USD two million dollars for the task. Mokhtar Lamani, a Moroccan diplomat who has most recently served as the Organization of Islamic Conferences Ambassador in New York, will head the AL mission. Lamani plans to travel to Iraq in late April to begin consultations and present his credentials. He will then visit regional capitals, including Amman to discuss a possible planning meeting in Jordan in May to prepare for an AL-organized national accord conference in Iraq later this year. In their resolution on Iraq, leaders also welcomed Jordan's proposal to host Iraqi religious leaders in Amman April 22 to promote tolerance. Finally, the Iraq committee of Arab Ministers plans to meet shortly to discuss all of these events.

Syria/Lebanon: Tensions High Between Lahoud, Siniora Camps

¶8. (C) Lebanese President Lahoud and Prime Minister Siniora both participated in the summit, seeking to maximize Arab support for their respective camp's positions on the Lebanon-Syria issue. With tensions high between the two, contacts reported a "heated exchange" during the closed-door session over how the Lebanon resolution would characterize Lebanon's "resistance" (or, "muqawema"). Iraqi FM Zebari characterized the exchange to poloff as "childish." In the end, the resolution ended up largely repeating previous texts on the subject. Most leaders were reportedly content to await results of the ongoing Lebanese national dialogue before pressing any separate agenda. AL Chief of Staff Youssef claimed to poloff April 3 that SYG Moussa's April 3-4 visit to Riyadh was not connected with any Arab initiative on Syria/Lebanon, and that the League would await Lebanese internal consensus on the key issues of disarming Hizballah and the Presidency before it took any action.

AL's Moussa Urges Arabs to Pursue Peaceful Nuclear Programs

¶9. (SBU) During opening speeches on March 28, AL SYG Moussa called upon Arab states to expand their efforts in the nuclear arena. Moussa, identifying what he considered a paucity of joint Arab action in the field of science, noted a Sudanese proposal to increase Arab efforts to "enter the world of peaceful uses of nuclear energy with all speed and momentum." The Arabs, he said, "should invest in it (i.e., joint scientific research) at the broadest scale out of support for the Arab scientific base and for serving society and meeting its escalating water and energy needs." Moussa's Chief of Staff told poloff that the AL would encourage greater Arab expenditure on scientific efforts in collaboration with private industry, and that a high-level seminar on science and education would be held in the coming months.

Arab League and Regional Reform

¶10. (U) During the summit, leaders signed a document authorizing a new AL Peace and Security Council (PSC), which will be comprised of five member states, the Chair of the Council of Ministers, the two previous Council Chairs, and the next two Council chairs. Once seven member states sign the agreement into force, the PSC will become active. Focused on inter-Arab conflict resolution and regional security, the body will have a wide-ranging mandate, and will be supplemented by new tools such as an informational data base, an early-warning system, and a committee of wise-men to

address reconciliation and post-conflict reconstruction. The work of the PSC is expected to be handled by the League Secretariat in Cairo without new staffing, though further

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details such as when the Council will be activated have yet to be worked out. While progress was made on a new PSC, a separate proposal to launch a new Arab Court of Justice was shelved for the time being, with several members apprehensive about the responsibilities of any such body. SYG Moussa delivered a compendium of AL member-state reports on respective efforts in the past year to promote internal reforms and movement toward democracy and liberalization. The subject of education was discussed at the Summit for the first time, with leaders deciding to appoint an expert committee to study the topic and make recommendations at the next summit.

Follow-Up

¶11. (C) Saudi Arabia will assume the rotating presidency at next year's summit, but requested that the summit be held at the League's headquarters in Cairo. This is not the first time an AL member has elected to allow the annual gathering to be held at the League headquarters in Cairo, but the move raised questions about the Kingdom's motives and led to further criticism of AL efforts to encourage Arab solidarity.

The Egyptian delegation also put forward President Mubarak's proposal to host additional Arab leaders' meetings outside the normal March summit framework, to address topics of concern without all 22 member states and without the normal parliamentary procedures and paperwork. No action is expected to occur on the Egyptian idea until next March at the earliest. The League still plans to hold its Arab-American conference in Houston this June.

¶12. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Khartoum.
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